

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 ABIDJA 05783 161840Z
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AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
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LONDON FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY MOOSE

E.O. 11652: GDS
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SUBJ: AFRICAN TROOPS IN SHABA

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SECRET

PAGE 02 ABIDJA 05783 161840Z

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SUMMARY: THE DECISION OF THE IVORY COAST TO CONTRIBUTE A
MILITARY MEDICAL TEAM TO THE SHABA INTER-AFRICAN FORCE WAS
THE RESULT OF MUCH SOUL SEARCHING AND DEBATE. THE GOIC
IS CONSCIOUS THAT THEIR ACTION MAY NOT BE WIDELY POPULAR
IN THE IVORY COAST. LITTLE PUBLICITY HAS BEEN GIVEN TO

THE DEPARTURE OF THE IVORIAN CONTINGENT. THIS SUGGESTS THAT GOIC WILL FAVOR EFFORTS TO LIMIT THE DURATION OF THE SHABA OPERATION. SUCH EFFORTS MUST, HOWEVER, HAVE AN AFRICAN CHARACTER AND OUR CONSULTATIONS WITH THE IVORIANS WILL HAVE TO BE HANDLED DISCREETLY. END SUMMARY.

1. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE IVORIAN GOVERNMENT IS PARTICIPATING IN THE INTER-AFRICAN OPERATION IN SHABA WITH MIXED FEELINGS. IMMEDIATELY AFTER OAU PRESIDENT BONGO'S APPEAL FOR AFRICAN ASSISTANCE TO ZAIRE, THE IVORIAN GOVERNMENT ON MAY 22 ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD CONTRIBUTE FOOD AND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO ZAIRE BUT NOT REPEAT NOT TROOPS. THE EVENTUAL DECISION TO SEND A 105-MAN MILITARY MEDICAL TEAM TO SHABA PROBABLY REPRESENTS A COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE VIEWS OF THOSE WHO FAVORED SENDING A FULLY EQUIPPED INFANTRY COMPANY AND THOSE WHO OPPOSED SENDING ANYTHING. WE HAVE HEARD FROM VARIOUS WELL-INFORMED IVORIANS THAT DEBATE WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT WAS SHARP. THE DECISION TO SEND THE MEDICAL TEAM WAS, WE BELIEVE, MADE PERSONALLY BY HOUPHOUET, PRESUMABLY AFTER CONSIDERABLE ARM-TWISTING BY GISCARD IN PARIS.

2. THE WAY IN WHICH THE IVORIAN GOVERNMENT HANDLED THE ACTUAL EMBARKATION OF THE MEDICAL TEAM IS A FURTHER INDICATION THAT THE MOVE AROUSED MISGIVINGS.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 ABIDJA 05783 161840Z

NO PUBLICITY WAS GIVEN TO THE DEPARTURE BY IVORIAN MEDIA. THE USAF C-141'S WHICH TRANSPORTED IVORIAN PERSONNEL TO ZAIRE WERE, AT THE REQUEST OF THE IVORIANS, PARKED IN THE MILITARY SECTION OF THE AIRPORT WELL OUT OF SIGHT OF THE MAIN TERMINAL. WHILE DEFENSE SECRETARY BAHIA-BLE AND GENERAL COULIBLAY, CHIEF OF STAFF OF IVORIAN ARMED FORCES, WERE PRESENT FOR THE LOADING AND DEPARTURE OF THE AIRCRAFT, THERE WERE FEW OTHER IVORIAN WITNESSES. THE ONLY MEDIA REFERENCES TO IVORIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE SHABA OPERATION OCCURRED ON RADIO-TELEVISION JUNE 11 AND IN THE DAILY FRATERNITE MATIN JUNE 12. IN EACH INSTANCE REFERENCE TO IVORIAN ROLE WAS LOW KEY AND IN THE CASE OF FRATERNITE MATIN WAS BURIED DEEP IN AN ARTICLE WHICH FOCUSED ON OTHER PARTICIPANTS IN THE SHABA FORCE.

3. THIS RATHER UNCHARACTERISTIC DIFFIDENCE ABOUT A VIRTUALLY UNPRECEDENTED IVORIAN INITIATIVE CERTAINLY SUGGESTS THAT THE GOVERNMENT FELT THE MOVE WOULD BE UNPOPULAR: FIRST, BECAUSE SOME IVORIANS WOULD REGARD IT AS PULLING FRENCH CHESTNUTS OUT OF THE FIRE; AND SECOND, BECAUSE OF PRESIDENT MOBUTU'S SPOTTY

IMAGE IN THE IVORY COAST. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES
THE IVORIAN GOVERNMENT WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY WELCOME
ANY EFFORT TO LIMIT THE LENGTH OF TIME THEIR
MEDICAL TEAM WILL BE IN SHABA. POLITICAL MOTIVES
ARE REINFORCED BY PRACTICAL ONES. BY SENDING A MEDICAL
TEAM TO SHABA, THE IVORIAN GOVERNMENT AVOIDED THE
PROBLEMS THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN CREATED B SENDING A
COMBAT TEAM, BUT ONLY AT THE COST OF STRIPPING THE
IVORIAN ARMED FORCES OF THEIR MEDICAL CAPABILITY.
SENIOR IVORIAN MILITARY OFFICERS AND THEIR FRENCH
ADVISERS WERE OPPOSED TO DECISION FOR THAT REASON
AND BECAUSE THEY BELIEVED THAT A UNIT COMPOSED OF
DISPARATE MEDICAL ELEMENTS DRAWN FROM VARIOUS PARTS
OF THE IVORY COAST WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO SUPPORT
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 ABIDJA 05783 161840Z

LOGISTICALLY.

4. WE THEREFORE BELIEVE THAT THE IVORIANS WILL BE WELL
DISPOSED TO THE IDEA OF FINDING A RESPECTABLE WAY TO
REPATRIATE THEIR PERSONNEL FROM ZAIRE SOONER RATHER THAN
LATER. WE ALSO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT CONSULTATIONS
ABOUT RETRAINING OF ZAIRIAN FORCES, WITHDRAWAL OF
INTER-AFRICAN FORCES AND RELATED MATTERS MUST BE
WITHIN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT. SENSITIVE TO THE FACT THAT
THE DECISION TO CREATE AN INTER-AFRICAN FORCE WAS REACHED
IN PARIS AND THAT THE FORCE WAS TRANSPORTED TO ZAIRE BY
NON-AFRICAN AIRCRAFT, THE IVORIANS WILL BE ESPECIALLY
CONSCIOUS OF THE NEED TO ESTABLISH AN AFRICAN IDENTITY FOR
FUTURE DECISIONS AFFECTING THE SHABA OPERATION. THIS
DOES NOT REPEAT NOT PRECLUDE CLOSE CONSULTATION BE-
TWEEN THE AMERICAN AND IVORIAN GOVERNMENTS -- INDEED
SUCH CONSULTATIONS WILL CONTINUE TO BE EXTREMELY
IMPORTANT-- BUT IT DOES MEAN THAT WE SHOULD CONDUCT
OUR EXCHANGES DISCREETLY AND AVOID DIPLOMATIC
BUSTLING AND PUBLIC EXHORTATIONS.
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